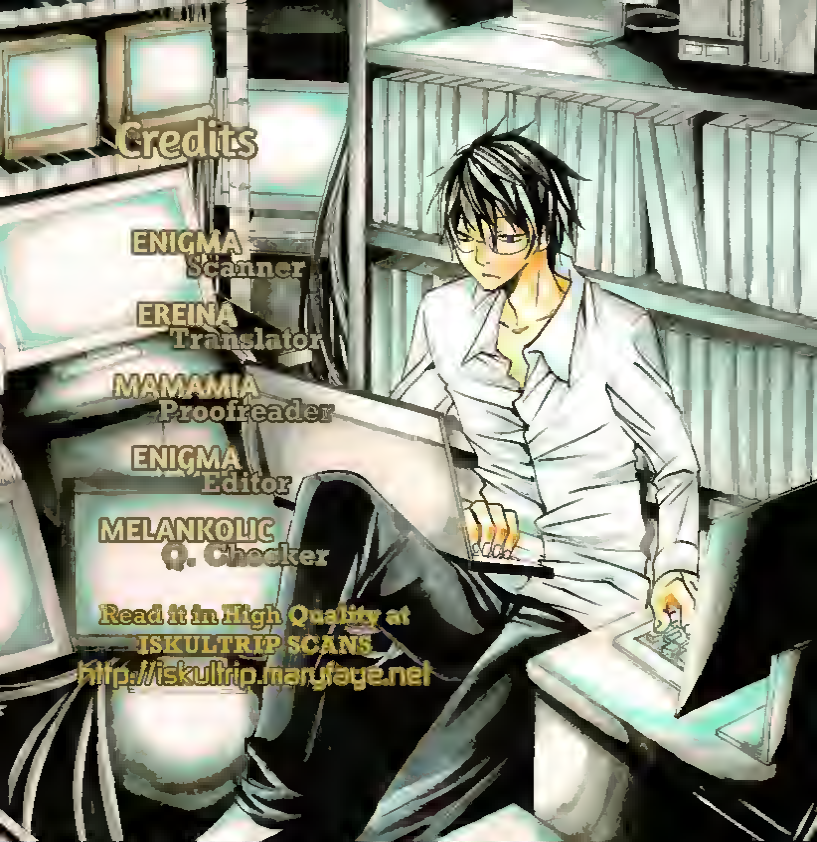
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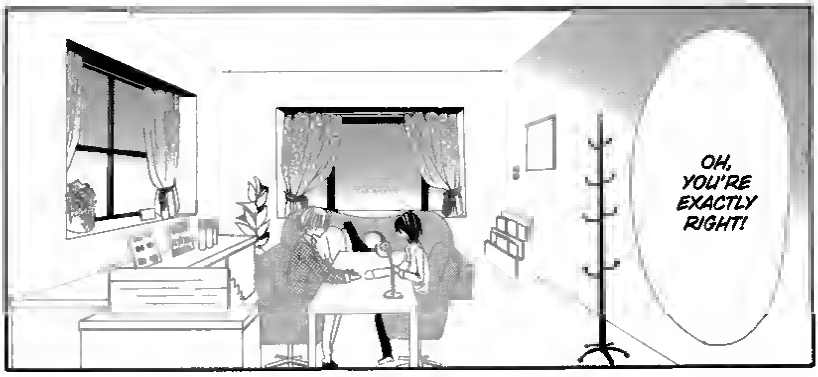
FILE. 7 Nail Salon of Distress

Nail Salon
Fortuna

Nail Salon
Fortuna


OH, YOU'RE EXACTLY RIGHT!

...SO, THIS IS THE ROOT OF YOUR STRESS, RIGHT?
EVEN THOUGH WE'VE DEVOTED OURSELVES TO MUSIC,
YET THE ADULTS REFUSE TO RECOGNIZE IT...
reach
PLEASE REST ASSURED
I'LL PREPARE THE MOST SUITABLE NAIL ART FOR YOU.

RUN RUN
NAO!
AH!
W-WHAT'S GOING ON? YOU LOOK SO DEPRESSED
gloomy
OH, IT'S JUST YOU, TAKITARO...
SHOCK!
NOTHING MUCH... JUST THAT THERE ARE TOO FEW CUSTOMERS..

HUH?
SPEAKING OF WHICH, WHY DO YOU LOOK SO CHEERFUL?
DO YOU MEAN FOR YOUR DIVINATION BUSINESS?
YEAH...
AH, WELL, THAT'S BECAUSE...
I FINISHED A NEW OUTFIT FOR A FIGHTING GAME! I WAS VERY SATISFIED WITH THE RESULT
I SEE...
IRK
Haaaa...
YOU'RE LATE!

YOU HAVE A GUEST.
A GUEST? ...AH.
YO!
GROSS—
Oops, not that DETECTIVE OOTA!
IT'S GROSS-NERD OOTA! GROSS OOTA!
THERE GOES MY EFFORT TO BE POLITE...
LOOKS LIKE THE PRESIDENT AND HANA ARE OUT TODAY.
flomp
HANA IS AT WORK...
...OH, YEAH.

MR. OOTA, YOU KNOW ABOUT HANA'S PAST...
RIGHT?
pull
gasp!
A PROS-THETIC ARM...
IT'S THE PRICE I HAD TO PAY FOR BEING UNABLE TO PROTECT THAT GIRL

WORK? FROM THE POLICE?
A REQUEST, TO BE EXACT. LATELY, THE REBELLIOUS KIDS BEING COUNSELED IN THE JUVENILE DIVISION HAVE SUDDENLY BECOME...
...
LET'S LEAVE REMINISCING FOR ANOTHER TIME. I CAME TO OFFER YOU WORK TODAY.
Eh...
THEY NO LONGER TALK BACK TO US AND HAVE BECOME MORE CHEERFUL.
OKAY, SO, WHERE'S THE PROBLEM?
D-DID THEY COMMIT CRIMES?
...MORE WELL-BEHAVED ONE AFTER ANOTHER.
WEREN'T YOU JUST BORED? OH, YOU TROUBLE MAKER, YOU!
NAO!
THE CHANGES HAPPENED TOO QUICKLY. SURE WE SHOULD BE GLAD FOR THESE DELINQUENT KIDS FOR TURNING INTO NEW LEAVES, BUT IT'S JUST TOO EERIE
SO I CASUALLY TRIED TO LOOK INTO WHAT MAY HAVE CAUSED THEM TO BECOME THIS WAY...

EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM WENT TO A NAIL SALON THAT HOUSES A CERTAIN RUMOR
...AND I WAS ABLE TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY HAD IN COMMON THE TARGET WAS REPORTED TO BE A WOMAN SURROUNDED BY TEENAGE GIRLS
Ow...
That hurts!
A "RUMOR" SURROUNDING A NAIL SALON?
THAT'S RIGHT I THINK THE RUMORS SAY THAT IT'S A NAIL SALON THAT CAN "RESOLVE ALL YOUR WORRIES."
...."RESOLVE WORRIES"?
WHEN UNVEILING THE TRUTH BEHIND THESE MYSTERIOUS INCIDENTS, THESE SILLY, SENSELESS RUMORS ALWAYS SEEM TO TURN UP. HOWEVER YOU LOOK AT IT, IT'S THE KIND OF JOB THE RUMOR SHOP CAN TAKE CARE OF.
RIGHT?
HE'S MAD, AFTER ALL....

STAND
SHOCK
SO MY CUSTOMERS WERE TAKEN AWAY, AFTER ALL.
HUH.
TAKITARO! LET'S INVESTIGATE!
THE RESOLVING OF GIRLS' WORRIES IS EXCLUSIVE TO FORTUNE-TELLING ONLY!
BUT NAO, WITH BOTH THE PRESIDENT AND HANA OUT, THAT'S...

...IT'S BEEN HARD ON YOU, NEWBIE
...YEAH. HAVEN'T GOTTEN USED TO IT YET
C'MON, LET'S GO INVESTI-GATE!
AH.
HERE IT IS. THE CONSULTANT'S HOME.

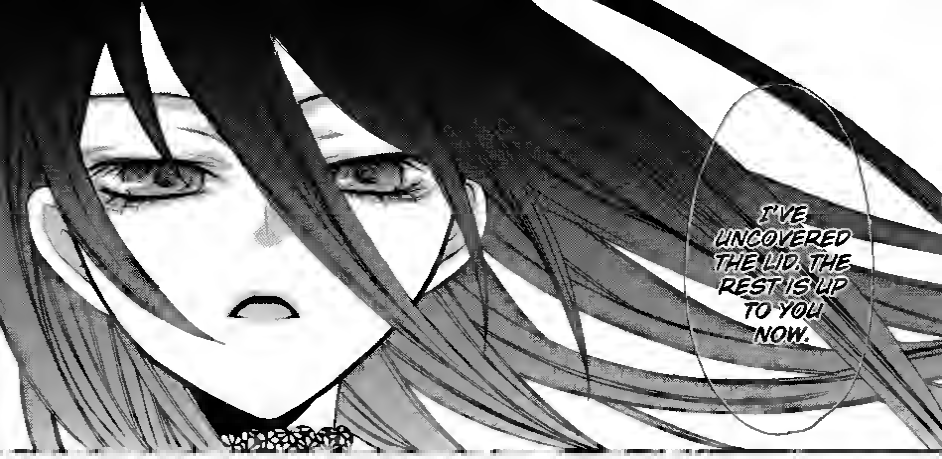
I HEARD... UH... NO, I MEAN, I FELT THAT SACHI HAD BEEN ACTING STRANGELY.
AS I MENTIONED ON THE PHONE EARLIER, I'M HER CLASSMATE.
I SEE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONCERN AND FOR COMING TO ME REGARDING THIS.
HUH?
OH... HA HA HA! SHE IS MY LITTLE SISTER! SHE ALSO GETS ALONG WELL WITH SACHI HA HA HA!
AND WHO IS THIS CHILD?
WE'RE CLOSE FRIENDS
SACHI SUDDENLY STRAIGHTENED UP, RIGHT?

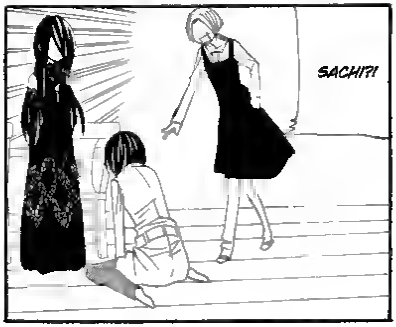
OH... WELL, YES, THAT'S TRUE ALTHOUGH OUR KID ISN'T VIOLENT, SHE'S EXTREMELY STUBBORN AND HEADSTRONG
STUBBORN... OVER WHAT?
WELL, SACHI WAS AIMING TO BECOME A MUSICIAN
WE WERE ALWAYS FIGHTING ABOUT HOW I THOUGHT SHE DISREGARDED HER STUDIES IN ORDER TO CHASE HER DREAM
BUT ONE DAY, ALL THE TALKS ABOUT MUSIC AND GUITAR JUST STOPPED IT'S AS IF...
AS IF...?
SHE WAS VERY PASSIONATE ABOUT MUSIC AND OFTEN SAID IT WAS HER SALVATION
AS IF SHE HAS NEVER BEEN INTERESTED.
HMM. IT'S EXACTLY WHAT OOTA SAID
YET, SHE CHANGED SO SUDDENLY I MEAN, SACHI JUST ISN'T THAT KIND OF PERSON TO DROP EVERYTHING OVERNIGHT.

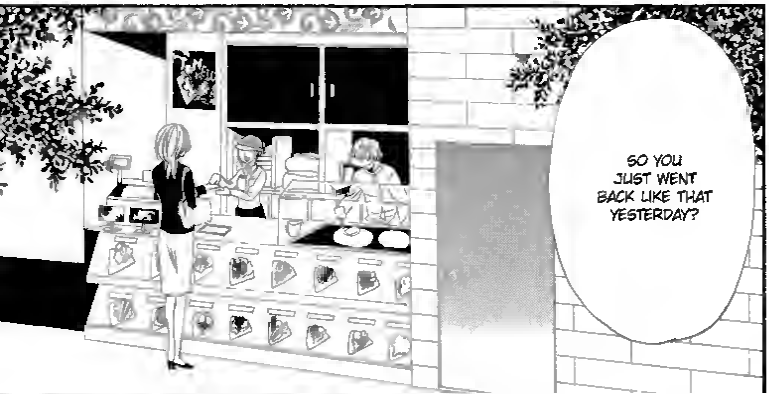
I'M HOME!
AH!
AH!
I-IT'S ME!
?
HUH? YOU GUYS—
WHO?
S-SACHI, YOU'RE HOME EARLY TODAY DON'T YOU HAVE PRACTICE WITH YOUR FRIENDS?
PRACTICE? FOR WHAT?
FOR GUITAR, OF COURSE DIDN'T YOU WANT TO BECOME A PRO?
An ha ha ha!
ME? GUITAR? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

...LOOKS LIKE IT HAS BEEN COVERED UP YOU, THAT CONDITION OF YOURS...
IT WON'T LAST LONG
?
WHAT'S WITH THIS KID?
Step
DID YOU FORGET EVERYTHING YOU SAID?
<GRAB>
HEY, STOP IT! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
N-N-NAO?!
?!

SW
AP
Collapse
AH...


I'VE UNCOVERED THE LID. THE REST IS UP TO YOU NOW.

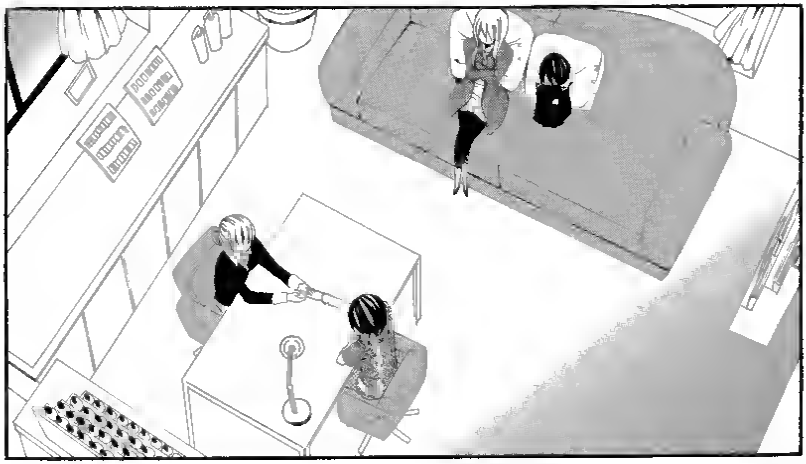

SACHI?!


SO YOU JUST WENT BACK LIKE THAT YESTERDAY?

AS FOR TODAY'S INVESTIGATION, NAO SAID IT'D BETTER IF YOU COME WITH US
WELL, SINCE IT'S FOR WORK, I GUESS THERE'S NO HARM IN IT.
LET'S GO, THEN!
TO THE FAMOUS NAIL SALON!
Nail Salon
Fortuna
2F
I JUST WENT WITH THE FLOW.

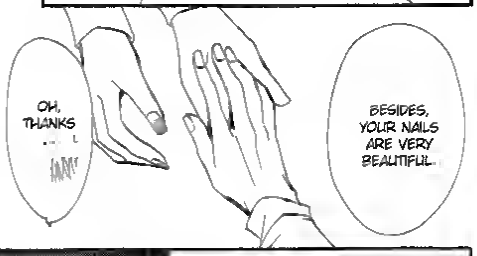
IT'S SMALLER THAN I EXPECTED. .
HMM.
WELCOME.
Smile
SORRY FOR COMING ON SHORT NOTICE. ARE YOU FREE RIGHT NOW?
YES. I DON'T HAVE ANY APPOINTMENTS RIGHT NOW.
THAT'S GREAT! THEN, UEMURA, YOU'VE GOT TO GET YOUR NAILS DONE
HUH? SHOULDN'T YOU DO IT?
<TA-DA!>
しゃらんっ

Tsuhaa!
OH, I'M SO SORRY! I WOULD BUT I JUST GOT AN EXPENSIVE SET DONE ON MY NAILS AT THE STUDIO TODAY.
WAIT...
WHAT DID YOU COME HERE FOR, THEN? THERE'S NO OTHER WAY, NAO'S GOT TO DO IT...
I REFUSE TO LET OTHERS PLAY WITH MY BODY.
hmph!
GRIN
THEN WHO WILL...
...
M—
MEEE?!



OUR SHOP'S NAIL ART DOESN'T DISCRIMINATE BETWEEN GENDERS
UM... IS THIS ALRIGHT FOR MEN, TOO?

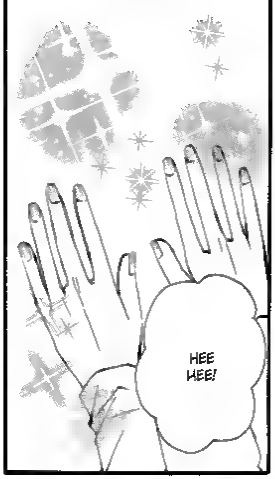
Grin
SORRY FOR THE WAIT. I'M SALON FORTUNA'S NAIL ARTIST, *MUNAKATA SAWORI*

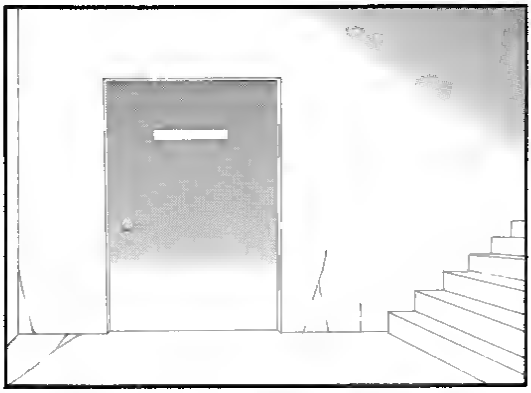

OH, THANKS...
BESIDES, YOUR NAILS ARE VERY BEAUTIFUL.

LET'S CHAT A LITTLE.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN YOU SEVERELY LOSE CONFIDENCE IN YOURSELF
AM I RIGHT?
HMM YOU MAY BE RIGHT.
YOU HAVE "LOST" SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT TO YOU IN THE PAST
HUH?
WELL? DOES IT BRING TO MIND ANYTHING?
YES... THERE WAS SOMEONE IMPORTANT

YES. I... WASN'T ABLE TO SAVE HER, BUT WHAT ABOUT IT?
YOU ARE ALWAYS WORRYING ABOUT IT SOMEWHERE IN YOUR HEART.
LET'S TALK ABOUT THIS IN MORE DETAIL.
REST ASSURED
reach
I'LL PREPARE THE MOST SUITABLE NAIL ART FOR YOU.


HEE HEE!



shudder
WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIM? HE'S CREEPING ME OUT.

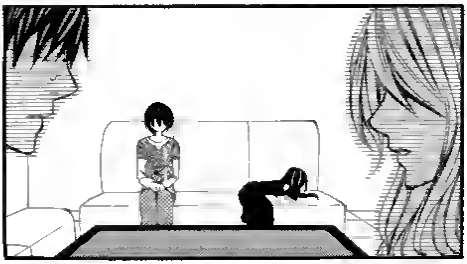
Fufu fu fu fu fu...
IT'S SO PRETTY!
...

COLD READING? WHAT'S THAT?
THE WAY THAT NAIL ARTIST TALKED... THERE'S NO MISTAKING IT.

"COLD READING".

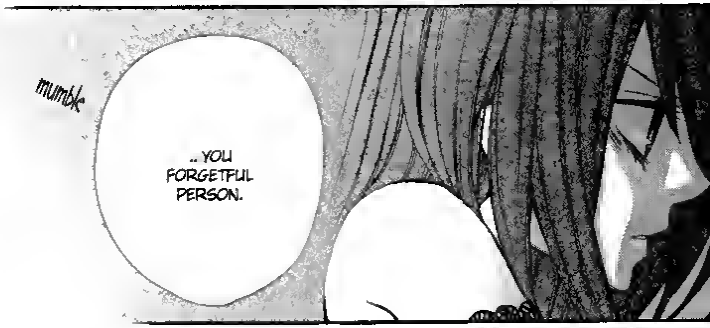
SO, DID YOU OBSERVE ANYTHING STRANGE FROM THAT SHOP?

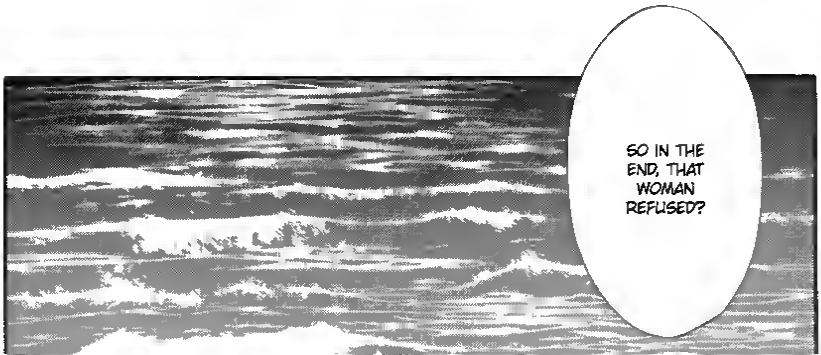
IT'S A *RHETORIC SKILL* USED TO GUIDE YOUR OPPONENT'S THOUGHTS
YOU ASK A GENERIC QUESTION THAT COULD HIT HOME FOR ANYONE, LIKE, "DO YOU HAVE ANY CONFIDENCE IN YOURSELF?" IN ORDER TO DETERMINE YOUR OPPONENT'S RESPONSE.
YOU KEEP ON REPEATING THIS PROCESS UNTIL THE PERSON OPENS UP AND DISCUSSES THEIR TROUBLES
RHETORIC IS IN YOUR FIELD
AND THAT'S CERTAINLY THE TYPE OF TRICK UEMURA WOULD FALL FOR
IT'S A PROFESSIONAL TECHNIQUE WIDELY USED BY MANY, SUCH AS THERAPISTS, COPS AND EVEN FORTUNE TELLERS.
OKAY, THAT MAKES SENSE AND WITH THAT SAID...
Nail Salon that resolves your worries.
TALKS RELATING TO THE RUMOR OF THIS NAIL SALON CAPABLE OF RESOLVING YOUR WORRIES...
HAS COMPLETELY GONE VIRAL ON THE NET AS WELL.



THERE ARE MANY POSSIBILITIES
HOWEVER... WHY WOULD A NAIL ARTIST NEED TO RESORT TO A TECHNIQUE LIKE COLD READING?

peaceful
I WONDER WHAT THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT? WHAT DO YOU THINK, NAO?

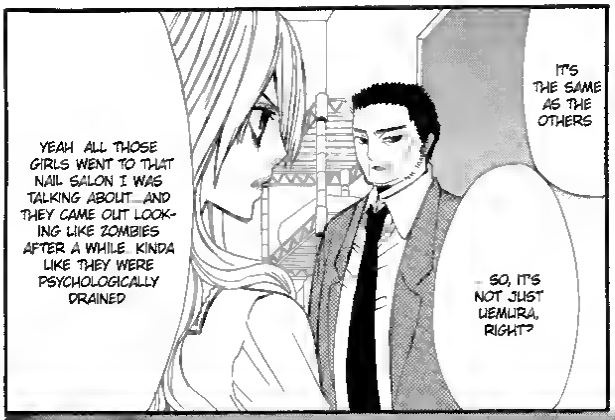

mumble
..YOU FORGETFUL PERSON.


SO IN THE END, THAT WOMAN REFUSED?

splash
SAEKI DOESN'T REALLY KNOW...
MY, MY... HOW ABOUT SHINDOU? NO INTEREST?
OH... IT'S YOU.
THERE'S NO NEED FOR THAT.
IF SHE... BECOMES TROUBLE... THEN I'LL... CLEAN UP.

THE WAY THINGS ARE NOW IS FINE
BY UNKNOWINGLY GOING DOWN THE WRONG PATH, HER POWER WILL BE ENOUGH TO DRIVE THE WORLD MAD
gleam
WON'T YOU MAKE SURE OF THAT?

?
A few days later..
SEE FOR YOURSELF.
OH BOY YOU HAVE GOT TO BE KIDDING
I...
mumble
I JOIN... LIC...
mumble
LIC?
mumble
WHY..? I'M...
mumble
mumble
mumble
mumble


YEAH. ALL THOSE GIRLS WENT TO THAT NAIL SALON I WAS TALKING ABOUT...AND THEY CAME OUT LOOKING LIKE ZOMBIES AFTER A WHILE. KINDA LIKE THEY WERE PSYCHOLOGICALLY DRAINED
IT'S THE SAME AS THE OTHERS
...SO, IT'S NOT JUST UEMURA, RIGHT?

HE'S BEEN ACTING LIKE THAT SINCE YESTERDAY. BEFORE THAT, THOUGH, HE WAS STRANGELY CHEERFUL

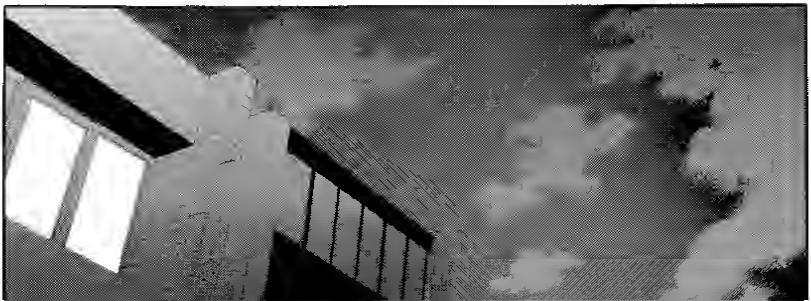
AND NOW, A NAIL ARTIST WHO CAN PSYCHOLOGICALLY DRAIN PEOPLE?
A NAIL ARTIST WHO USES RHETORIC SKILLS. A NAIL ARTIST WHO CAN RESOLVE YOUR WORRIES
OUR INFORMATION IS ALL OVER THE PLACE

AHHH!!! SO ANNOYING!!! ALL OF THIS IS JUST SO ANNOYING!!!

HMPH. CAN'T EVEN ESTABLISH A THEORY WITH INFORMATION LIKE THESE
THIS IS WHY RUMORS ARE...

N-NAO...? COULD IT BE YOU... SAW SOMETHING?
SIL ENCE
I HAVEN'T SEEN ANYTHING! EVERYTHING IS ALL JUST A BIG MISUNDER-STANDING!
WHY HAVEN'T YOU REA-LIZED?!
GLARE
ME...? WHAT... SHOULD I DO...?
YOU, THERE! STOP ACTING SO BURNED OUT, TAKITARO! IT'S THE JOB OF THE RUMOR SHOP TO MANIPULATE RUMORS! GET TO WORK!

YOU COSPLAY IDIOT!
AT LEAST REMEMBER THE THINGS YOU ENJOY!



CLACK
click
WHO IS IT? YOU GUYS AGAIN?!
twish
YOU ARE...
click
OH... YOU WERE WITH THE BOY FROM LAST TIME...

I'M "SLEEPLESS PROPHET", A DIVINER.
COME INSIDE!
YOU NEED TO SEE TAKITARO AGAIN
..TAKI-TARO? YOU MEAN THAT BOY?
fwish
I'M CZAS!
POW
POW
CZAS OF GUREN!

TAKE THAT!
IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A COSTUME FOR A FIGHTING GAME HE LIKES.
STIFLING, ISN'T IT?
WHAT IS HE WEARING?
LOOK AT HIS NAILS AGAIN?
HMPH!
squat
NOW, TAKE A LOOK AT THIS CHARACTER, THE CURRENT TAKITARO
HMPH!
squat
HE'S THE SAME GUY AS BEFORE?! HE'S LIKE A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PERSON!
THAT'S HOW HE IS.
I UNDERSTAND I ACCEPT THIS WORK TO PAINT HIS NAIL ART
THEN THERE SHOULDN'T BE A PROBLEM WITH GAME CHARACTERS.
THERE'S NO DIFFERENCE IF YOU DO IT ON A MALE OR A FEMALE, RIGHT?

WHILE YOU BELIEVE IN YOUR STRENGTH, YOU STILL WANT TO IMPROVE IT EVEN FURTHER
YEAH! I'M GOING TO GET STRONGER AND STRONGER!
YEAH! IT'S A SEVERE AND HARSH PATH, AND I STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO!
TO BECOME STRONGER BY SURPASSING YOUR FATHER... ISN'T THAT A VERY HARSH PATH TO TAKE?
THAT'S RIGHT! IF I CAN'T WIN AGAINST MY FATHER, THEN I CAN'T CALL MYSELF A MAN OF TRUE STRENGTH!
THAT MUST BE HARD ON YOU. TO BECOME STRONGER, YOU WILL HAVE TO OVERCOME MANY DIFFICULTIES. ISN'T THERE A GREAT BARRIER IN YOUR WAY?
!
THIS IS...
PLEASE REST ASSURED. I WILL PREPARE THE MOST SUITABLE NAIL ART FOR YOU.
OH... I SEE. SO THAT IS WHAT TROUBLES YOU.

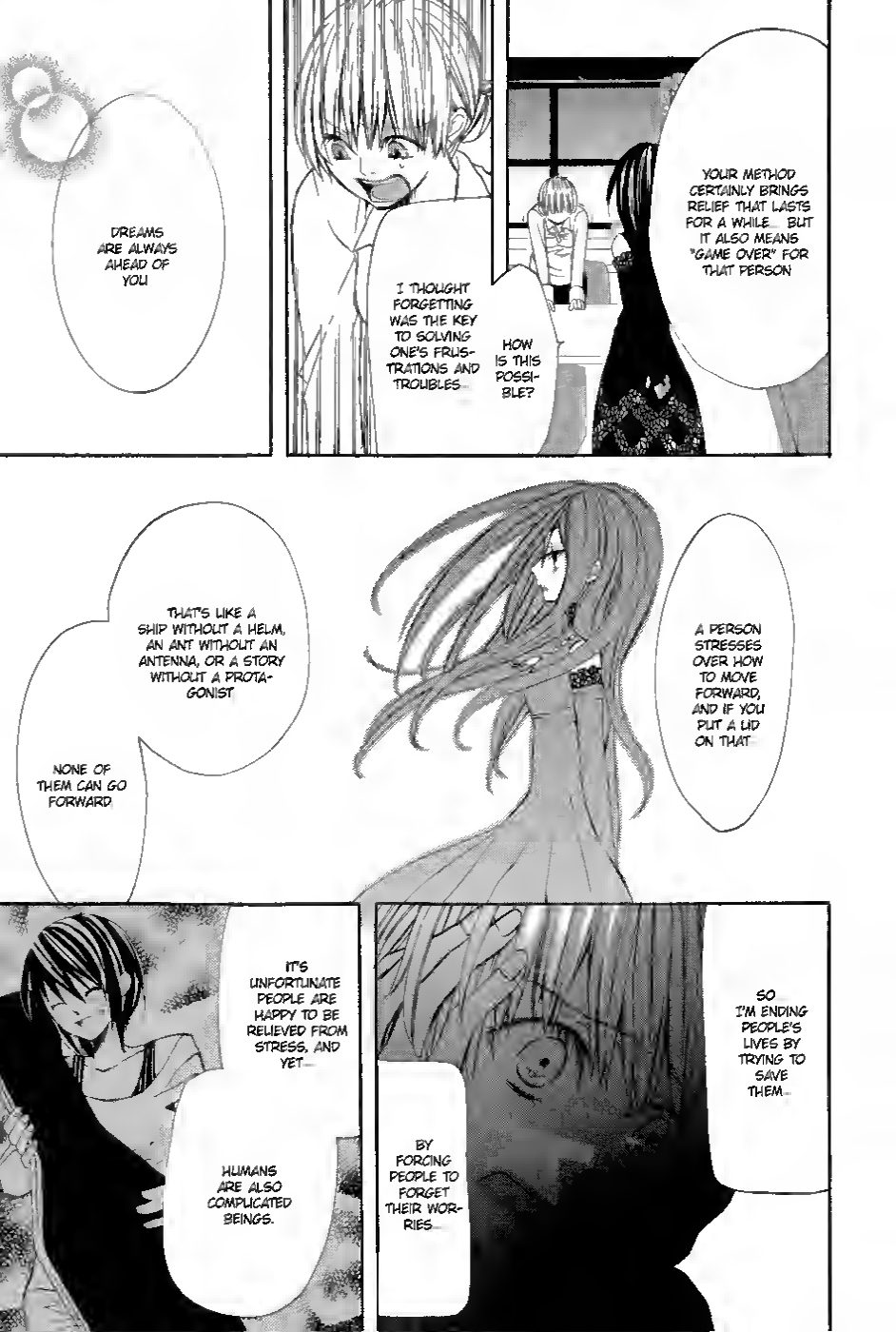
YUP.
THIS CHARACTER'S ONLY WORRY IS HIS WISH TO BECOME STRONGER.
HIS... HIS HEART IS .
...WELL? YOU FINALLY FIGURED IT OUT?
MY POWER ..
COULD IT BE THAT YOU. .
—!
SIMPLY PUT, YOUR POWER IS TO MAKE PEOPLE FORGET THEIR TROUBLES.
AM I RIGHT?

DIVINATION BY READING THE STARS, BIRTH DATES, FLOWERS OR PALMS...
AS LONG AS ONE HAS THE CAPABILITY AND THE DESIRE, THEY CAN READ A PERSON'S HEART OR THEIR FUTURE FROM JUST ABOUT ANYTHING, EVEN SOMETHING AS SMALL AS NAILS WILL DO.
...AND YOU ARE ABLE TO READ THE SHAPE OF A PERSON'S HEART FROM THEIR NAILS.
...THAT'S RIGHT.
I STUDIED ONYCHO-
ON TOP OF THAT, I CONVERSE WITH PEOPLE TO FIND OUT WHAT IS TROUBLING THEM AND HELP THEM FORGET
THEN I CRAFT THE SHAPE OF THEIR HEARTS IN THE FORM OF NAIL ART ON THEIR NAILS

*Reading of nails.

YOU KNOW IT YOURSELF WHEN YOU LOOKED AT TAKITARO IN HIS CURRENT STATE EARLIER, YOU NOTICED IT
THAT'S NOT TRUE AT ALL!
YOUR METHOD... ONLY PROVIDES A TEMPORARY FIX
T-THAT WAS...
...NO, THAT'S NOT TRUE
ONCE I'VE APPLIED MY NAIL ART, IT WOULD CONTINUE TO SAVE THE PERSON FROM THEIR TROUBLES EVEN IF THE ART GETS REMOVED OR FADES AWAY, AS IT WOULD HAVE ALREADY PENETRATED DEEP IN THEIR HEARTS!
FOR GAME CHARACTERS LIKE THIS, STRESSING OVER THEIR EXTREME GOALS IS THE SAME AS BEING ALIVE.
STRESS... IS THE SAME AS BEING ALIVE...?

THE CHARACTERS WHO LIVE FOR BECOMING STRONGER STRESSES OVER HOW THEY CAN BECOME STRONGER.
THE STORY ENDS WHEN THEIR STRESS IS RELIEVED.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
AND WHEN A STORY ENDS, IT ALSO MEANS IT'S GAME OVER. FROM THERE ON-WARDS...
...!
THERE IS NO STORY.
COULD IT BE... THE SAME GOES FOR THE GIRLS WHO CAME TO SEE ME?
HAVE YOU FINALLY REALIZED?

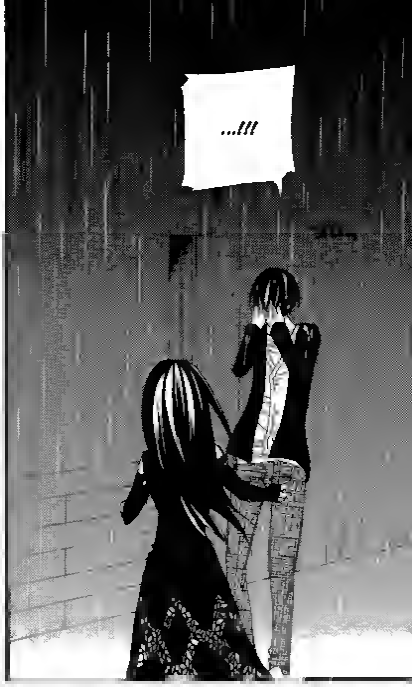

DREAMS ARE ALWAYS AHEAD OF YOU
I THOUGHT FORGETTING WAS THE KEY TO SOLVING ONE'S FRUSTRATIONS AND TROUBLES...
HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?
YOUR METHOD CERTAINLY BRINGS RELIEF THAT LASTS FOR A WHILE... BUT IT ALSO MEANS "GAME OVER" FOR THAT PERSON
A PERSON STRESSES OVER HOW TO MOVE FORWARD, AND IF YOU PUT A LID ON THAT...
THAT'S LIKE A SHIP WITHOUT A HELM, AN ANT WITHOUT AN ANTENNA, OR A STORY WITHOUT A PROTAGONIST
NONE OF THEM CAN GO FORWARD
SO I'M ENDING PEOPLE'S LIVES BY TRYING TO SAVE THEM...
BY FORCING PEOPLE TO FORGET THEIR WORRIES...
IT'S UNFORTUNATE PEOPLE ARE HAPPY TO BE RELIEVED FROM STRESS, AND YET...
HUMANS ARE ALSO COMPLICATED BEINGS.

WHAT A SHOCK... SO THAT MEANS THERE'S NO MEANING TO HAVING THIS ABILITY...
THAT'S NOT TRUE.
THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A MEANINGLESS ABILITY.
HUH...?
DIVINATION EXISTS IN ORDER TO HELP THE LIVING, DON'T YOU AGREE, MISS NAIL READER?

OKAY, TAKITARO, WE'RE DONE HERE.
I AM GUREN'S..
GEEZ, END THAT CHARACTER ALREADY!
drag drag
THOSE PEOPLE... INVITED ME WHILE REALIZING THAT I WAS UNKNOWINGLY MAKING PEOPLE SUFFER...

zaaaaaa
I'M SO TIRED...
I'M NO GOOD... TALKING THAT MUCH WAS WAY OUT OF MY CHARACTER.
...I GUESS THERE'S NO HELPING IT.

AH...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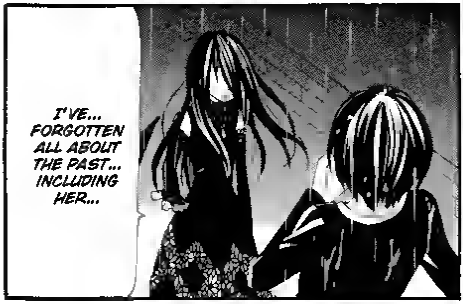
I'VE... FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT THE PAST... INCLUDING HER...

TAKITARO, THE REASON YOU JOINED UC WAS BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT GIRL.
IT MUST HAVE BEEN HARD ON YOU.
YOU MIGHT THINK IT'S MORE OF A BLESSING TO FORGET...
BUT...

BUT... I DON'T WANT YOU TO DIS-APPEAR.
I'M SORRY, NAO...
I WON'T DISAPPEAR.
...OH, REALLY?

I'M SORRY, KUSAKA...

SACHI, WAIT! WHAT ABOUT YOUR STUDIES?
SORRY! I'LL STUDY PROPERLY AFTER PRACTICE!
I WON'T RUN AWAY ANYMORE!
The rumors about the nail salon started circulating again.

Except that now, there's a little difference.
It's now known as a Nail Salon that can help you face your worries.